

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

CHAPTER 23: OBJECTIONS TO LITTLE SOLDIERS

1. Are not many good Christian people very much opposed to children taking any public part in effort for the Salvation of souls?

Yes, they are; but this does not prove the practice to be wrong, seeing that a great many very good Christian people make the strongest objections to uneducated men or women saying or doing anything in public to save sinners from going to Hell. In fact, many professors of religion object to anybody taking an active part in public services except the ordained ministers of a particular Church. Therefore the objection of such people to children taking any part in the War of itself proves nothing.

2. Will you name some of the objections these persons bring against children speaking and praying publicly?

(1.) It is said that children do not understand spiritual things well enough to talk about them. But spiritual things are not matters of the understanding so much as of the heart and conscience; and saved children understand and know them far better than unsaved ministers or divines, or writers, or anybody else who has not the Spirit of God, no matter how learned they may be.

Was it not precisely this over which the Saviour rejoiced when he said, "I thank Thee, O Father, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes"? And did He not once set a little child in the midst of His disciples, and say, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"? And was He not found in the temple about His Father's business at twelve years old?

Surely, both by precept and example, our Lord has shown us that mere intellectual qualifications, age, and human experience are nothing without that spiritual discernment and power which come only by inward revelation, and which, if possessed only by a little child, make that child mighty through God.

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(2.) It is objected that children cannot possibly be sufficiently experienced in Salvation to talk about it. This, like most of the other objections brought against children's working for God, would equally apply to all testimonies of Divine things borne by new converts, whether those who testify be old or young.

If children have realised the forgiveness of sins, then they must, of necessity, be sufficiently experienced to be justified in saying so; and unless they do say so, they cannot comply with the statement of the Holy Spirit, who says that "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto Salvation."
– Rom. 10:10.

(3.) It is objected that children should not speak of their conversion, because they may be mistaken.

This is equally true of old converts. Indeed, children being much more simple and sincere than adults, they are quite as likely to know, and be correct in stating what God has done for them, as older people are.

(4.) It is objected that children are so fickle, and so frequently fall away, and that to do so after taking a public part in religious teaching will bring discredit on the Lord's work.

The same may be said as to adults. Are no grown-up people to testify until they are sure that they will not fall away? If so, there would be very few testimonies at all; because, how can any man guarantee his future perseverance? But it is not certain that a greater proportion of children fall away than of adults; only that, in the case of children, when that calamity happens, as we have before observed, they are sincere enough to give up professing, and go out of the ranks of the Lord's Host altogether; whereas, in the cases of adults, when the salt has lost its savour – when all the spiritual power has gone out of their hearts – they are only too often ashamed to say so, and, whether from this or some other motive, they keep up the form of godliness, although destitute of the power.

(5.) It is further objected that, to take part in public services, or to do anything for the

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Salvation of others, is calculated to puff children up, and make them vain. No doubt there is a danger here, which we see quite clearly; but the Spirit of God will lift up a standard against the enemy in the hearts of the little ones; and if parents will become workers together with Him in warning them against spiritual pride, and showing them how awful and offensive to God any such feeling must be, exhorting them to humility and self-abasement, and exhibiting this spirit before them in their own soul exercises, such parents will be gladdened by seeing united in their children the meekness of babes with the courage of true Soldiers of Jesus Christ.

But is there not the danger of being puffed up with grown-up people? Are those who raise this objection prepared to stop everybody who takes part in public meetings because there is a possibility of their being exalted and made conceited thereby? If they were, I am afraid they would silence a great number who now take a prominent part in public services.

(6.) It is objected that for children to speak publicly is a reflection upon their fathers and mothers and elders who may not be converted.

When such are the facts, it is very proper that mothers, fathers, and elders should be reflected upon, and there is no doubt in many cases it has made such unsaved and useless elders ashamed of themselves after a very blessed fashion. But apart from this, if everyone is to be prevented from taking part in public meetings, whose doing so would reflect upon others who have been before them in opportunity and privilege, but who are behind them in Salvation, there will be no speakers left, for, as in the beginning, the last are first, and the first are still last.

(7.) When the children do not live according to their profession, is it not said to lead the enemy to blaspheme? Well, suppose it does, is it more so in the case of children than in that of adults? If we were to stop all children from taking part in public religious Services because some of them did not live in private according to their religious profession, we ought with equal justice to stop the public exercises of all grown-up people for the same reason, and by this rule every Christian's mouth would be closed tomorrow.

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(8.) It is objected that children ought not to speak because their statements are so often parrot-like – the mere repetition of what they hear older people say.

But will not this objection apply with almost equal force to adult speakers? If no one is to testify, preach, or pray, but those whose utterances are entirely original, if from all sermons and exhortations there is to be taken out all that these speakers have heard from the lips of others or read in books or commentaries, what an awful silence there will be in most cathedrals, churches, and chapels on the approaching Sabbath!

But if in describing the changes God has wrought in them, or in expressing their desires for those about them, or if in the petitions they offer to God, suppose the children do use the language they have heard from older people, is it so very objectionable if God has repeated in them the same experience?

It is not the words we have to care about so much as the ideas, feelings, and desires which the words represent, and if the ideas, feelings, and desires are what they should be, we cannot very well complain because they are described in the language of other people.

Suppose one out of a row of children were to state that he was a sinner lost and undone, and that God in mercy had pardoned him, and made him aware of the fact, and put the desire in his heart to see all the other children and big people in the world converted and made as happy as he was, I do not know that I should complain if the rest of the children in the same row were simply to say ditto, ditto, providing there was reasonable ground for concluding that they spoke of what had really occurred.

What we want are facts; give us these, and we will not quarrel about the manner in which they are related, or about the special words used to describe them.